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Environment

and its Elements in the Qur'an

By

E-Da`wah Committee



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Introduction

The Glorious Qur'an is the miraculous book of God, that falsehood can by no means approach. Allah, the Almighty, said about it, **"We have not neglected in the Register a thing."** (Al-An`am 6:38)

It is thus important to understand how the Qur'an tackled the environment, its components and balance, and how the Qur'an discussed the issue of the protection and development of the environment.

There are numerous verses in the Qur'an that deal in general with the issue of the environment, and some of them counted the elements and components of the environment accurately and inclusively, such as Allah's saying, **"To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth and what is between them and what is under the soil."** (Ta-Ha 20:6)

The verse covers everything between heavens and earth, such as the sun, heat, wind, clouds and rain, which constitute the natural environment. The phrase "and what is under the soil," refers to the underground materials, whether geological, metal or natural, that can be extracted and invested. Moreover, it includes the groundwater that can be pulled out and used for agriculture and settlement.¹

Among the verses that cover the elements of environment in general is Allah's saying:

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the [great] ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what

¹ *Al-Khawass Al-Qur'aniyyah wa Shumuliyyat Al-Hasr*, Ibrahim Hazim, 'Aalam Al-Binaa' magazine, July issue, Cairo, 1985.

Allah has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every [kind of] moving creature, and [His] directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are signs for a people who use reason.” (Al-Baqarah 2:164)

The verse gives a broader meaning of the environment to include, the earth, heavens, time, transportation -referred to by ships, water, clouds... All of this and the interactive operations that occur among them are only recognized by those who have active reason.

The following is a presentation of how the Qur'an discussed some of the elements of the environment:

Water



Water is among the most important ecosystem elements in the Qur'an; therefore, it was mentioned in dozens of positions in the Glorious Qur'an, mostly in the context of reminding people of God's blessings and graces upon them, topped by the grace of water.

Water draws its significance from the fact that it is the origin of life on this earth. Allah, the Almighty, told us about this in the following verses,

"Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?"
(Al-Anbiyaa' 21:30)

"Allah has created every [living] creature from water. And of them are those that move on their bellies, and of them are those that walk on two legs, and of them are those that walk on four. Allah creates what He wills." (An-Nur 24:45)

"And it is He who has created from water a human being and made him [a relative by] lineage and marriage." (Al-Furqan 25:54)

The Qur'an talks about the functions of water in the following verse:

"Have they not seen that We drive the water [in clouds] to barren land and bring forth thereby crops from which their livestock eat and [they] themselves? Then do they not see?" (As-Sajdah 32:27)

In other contexts, the Qur'an points out the source of water in the following verses:

"And it is He who sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby the growth of all things." (Al-An'am 6:99)

"And We have sent down rain from the sky in a measured amount and settled it in the earth. And indeed, We are Able to take it away." (Al-Mu'minun 23:18)

"And who sends down rain from the sky in measured amounts, and We revive thereby a dead land - thus will you be brought forth." (Az-Zukhruf 43:11)

Water is one of the greatest blessings of Allah –such as other elements of nature- but it may turn into a curse for those who disbelieve in God. Allah, the Almighty, informed us about some previous people who were drowned with water such as the people of Noah, as Allah says:

"And the people of Noah - when they denied the messengers, We drowned them, and We made them for mankind a sign. And We have prepared for the wrongdoers a painful punishment." (Al-Furqan 25:37)

Also, the people of Pharaoh who disbelieved in Moses were drowned. Allah says:

“And [recall] when We parted the sea for you and saved you and drowned the people of Pharaoh while you were looking on.” (Al-Baqarah 2:50)

Seas and Rivers



Among the important elements of the environment that keep water and direct its use towards the benefit of people are the seas and oceans that God bestowed upon His slaves. God stated that its functions enable:

- Fishing, and extraction of ornaments and decorations, as indicated in Allah's saying, **"And it is He who subjected the sea for you to eat from it tender meat and to extract from it ornaments which you wear."** (An-Nahl 16:14)
- Transportation as the sea enables one of the most important means of transportation, namely ships. God has made it a manifestation of His honor of man as Allah made it easy for man to move by the use of the land and the sea. He, the Almighty, says, **"And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea."** (Al-Israa' 17:70) **"It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea."** (Yunus 10:22) **"And subjected for you the ships to sail through the sea by His command and subjected for you the rivers."** (Ibrahim 14:32)

- The sea is a source of livelihood for many people, as Allah, the Almighty, says, **“It is Allah who subjected to you the sea so that ships may sail upon it by His command and that you may seek of His bounty; and perhaps you will be grateful.”** (Al-Jathiyah 45:12)

Clouds and Rain



Among the elements of the environment associated with water are the clouds that carry water and then rain heavily on the earth so that people and cattle can drink that water. The wind has been mentioned repeatedly in the Qur'an as an act of obligation to people. For example, God says:

"And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy until, when they have carried heavy rainclouds, We drive them to a dead land and We send down rain therein and bring forth thereby [some] of all the fruits. Thus will We bring forth the dead; perhaps you may be reminded." (Al-A`raf 7:57)

Rain is considered a source of water, as Allah says:

"And We have sent the fertilizing winds and sent down water from the sky and given you drink from it. And you are not its retainers." (Al-Hijr 15:22)

He also says:

"And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy until, when they have carried

heavy rainclouds, We drive them to a dead land and We send down rain therein and bring forth thereby [some] of all the fruits. Thus will We bring forth the dead; perhaps you may be reminded.” (Al-A`raf 7:57)

In another verse describing the mechanism of raining, Allah, the Almighty, says:

“Do you not see that Allah drives clouds? Then He brings them together, then He makes them into a mass, and you see the rain emerge from within it. And He sends down from the sky, mountains [of clouds] within which is hail, and He strikes with it whom He wills and averts it from whom He wills. The flash of its lightening almost takes away the eyesight.” (An-Nur 24:43)

Thunder and Lightening

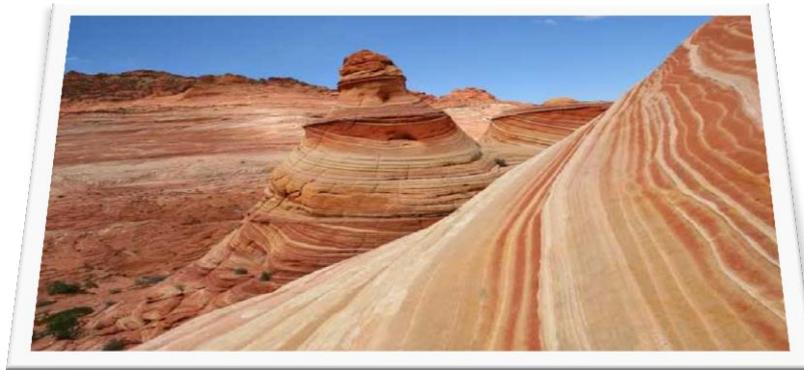


Among the natural phenomena that accompany raining are lightning, a light-flash which occurs as a result of electric charging operations in the atmosphere, and thunder which is a sound that occurs as a result of the sudden expansion of air due to sudden, severe heat resulting from lightning. Thunder and lightning storms result in the cumulonimbus clouds and cause very heavy rain.

Thunder and lightning are natural phenomena that stir fear and apprehension in the hearts of people; however, Allah mentioned them among the things that glorify and, along with angels, stand in awe of Him. He said:

“And the thunder exalts [Allah] with praise of Him - and the angels [as well] from fear of Him.”
(Ar-Ra`d 13:13)

Mountains



The mountains are among the important environmental elements mentioned in more than thirty positions in the Qur'an, some of which are related to their function in this life, and others are related to their situation on the Day of Resurrection. What matters to us here is their position as an element of the environment. The glorious Qur'an stated several functions of mountains including:

- Mountains serve as pegs that sustain the balance and stability of the earth, since, Allah, the Almighty, mentions them as a grace for His creation, **"Have We not made the earth a resting place? And the mountains as stakes?"** (An-Naba' 78:6-7) The Qur'an stressed this meaning in many verses in nine times describing mountains as "firmly set" as Allah says, **"And We placed within the earth firmly set mountains, lest it should shift with them."** (Al-Anbiya' 21:31) Also, He says, **"And We placed therein lofty, firmly set mountains and have given you to drink sweet water."** (Al-Mursalat 77:27)
- One of the functions of mountains is that they can be used as a place for people to live inside them, as God says about the people of Al-Hijr **"And they used to**

carve from the mountains, houses, feeling secure.” (Al-Hijr 15:82) God states in other positions the same meaning. He says: **“And you carve out of the mountains, homes, with skill.”** (Ash-Shu`ara' 26:149), **“And Allah has made for you, from that which He has created, shadows and has made for you from the mountains, shelters...”** (An-Nahl 16:81)

This is not limited to humans only, but also extends to other creatures as Allah says, **“And your Lord inspired to the bee, ‘Take for yourself among the mountains, houses.’”** (An-Nahl 16:68)

- Mountains contribute to the formation of clouds and rain due to their streamlined shape. Therefore, the Qur'an linked in many verses between the mountains on the one hand and rain, water, and rivers on the other hand, such as the following verses: **“And it is He who spread the earth and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers...”** (Ar-Ra`d 13:3) **“And We placed therein lofty, firmly set mountains and have given you to drink sweet water.”** (Al-Mursalat 77:27)
- The multiplicity of the types of mountains and their colors is a kind of adornment in the earth, and an indication of the Omnipotence of Allah, the Almighty, as Allah says, **“Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby fruits of varying colors? And in the mountains are tracts, white and red of varying shades and [some] extremely black.”** (Fatir 35:27)

Cattle



Cattle are among the key environmental elements which Allah has put for the service of man, though they share with him using up other elements of the environment such as water, air, plants, etc.

The word An`am (cattle) has been mentioned 32 times in the Qur'an, including the following verses that point out Allah's graces, **"Do they not see that We have created for them from what Our hands have made, grazing livestock, and [then] they are their owners? And We have tamed them for them, so some of them they ride, and some of them they eat. And for them therein are [other] benefits and drinks, so will they not be grateful?"** (Ya-Sin 36:71-73)

Allah, the Almighty, mentions eight kinds of cattle as He says, **"He created you from one soul. Then He made from it its mate, and He produced for you from the grazing livestock eight mates."** (Az-Zumar 39:6)

In another position, Allah explained what He meant by eight mates in the surah entitled Al-An`am as He said,

"[They are] eight mates - of the sheep, two and of the goats, two. Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Inform me with knowledge, if you should be truthful." And of the camels, two and of the cattle, two. Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Or were you witnesses when Allah charged you with this? Then who is more unjust than one who invents a lie about Allah to mislead the people by [something] other than knowledge? Indeed, Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people." (Al-An`am 6:143-144)

Cattle are communities like humans, as Allah, the Almighty, says, **"And there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you. We have not neglected in the Register a thing. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered."** (Al-An`am 6:38)

The Qur'an has touched on different types of cattle but we will rest only on the following:

1. **Camels**

They were mentioned two times in the Qur'an, the first in the aforementioned verses and the second in the following verse, **"Then do they not look at the camels - how they are created?"** (Al-Ghashiyah 88:17)

This verse directs us to reflection and contemplation on the creation of camels and how they are prepared for bearing heavy loads in harsh environmental conditions. Modern science has discovered a lot of

miracles in camels, and the secrets and wisdoms that Almighty Creator has put in them.

2. Cows

The cow is mentioned in both singular and plural forms in nine positions in the Qur'an, the most well-known of which is the story of the cow of the Children of Israel. Allah, the Almighty, says, **"And [recall] when Moses said to his people, "Indeed, Allah commands you to slaughter a cow." They said, "Do you take us in ridicule?" He said, "I seek refuge in Allah from being among the ignorant." They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is." [Moses] said, "[Allah] says, 'It is a cow which is neither old nor virgin, but median between that,' so do what you are commanded." They said, "Call upon your Lord to show us what is her color." He said, "He says, 'It is a yellow cow, bright in color - pleasing to the observers.'" They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is. Indeed, [all] cows look alike to us. And indeed we, if Allah wills, will be guided." He said, "He says, 'It is a cow neither trained to plow the earth nor to irrigate the field, one free from fault with no spot upon her.' "They said, "Now you have come with the truth." So they slaughtered her, but they could hardly do it." (Al-Baqarah 2:67-71)**

The distinguished characteristics of cows and how to choose them may be learnt from the above verses.

3. Sheep and Goats

They have been mentioned in Allah's saying, **"[They are] eight mates - of the sheep, two and of the**

goats, two. Say, "Is it the two males He has forbidden or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Inform me with knowledge, if you should be truthful." (Al-An`am 6:143)

The Qur'an refers to both of them in three positions as God says, **"And to those who are Jews We prohibited every animal of uncloven hoof; and of the cattle and the sheep We prohibited to them their fat, except what adheres to their backs or the entrails or what is joined with bone."** (Al-An`am 6:146)

Also, He says, **"And what is that in your right hand, O Moses?" He said, "It is my staff; I lean upon it, and I bring down leaves for my sheep and I have therein other uses." (Ta-Ha 20:17-18)** Also, Allah says, **"And [mention] David and Solomon, when they judged concerning the field - when the sheep of a people overran it [at night], and We were witness to their judgement."** (Al-Anbiyaa' 21:78)

4. Horses, Mules and Donkeys

They have been mentioned in Allah's saying, **"And [He created] the horses, mules and donkeys for you to ride and [as] adornment. And He creates that which you do not know."** (An-Nahl 16:8)

Horses were mentioned alone two times in the Qur'an. The first time is in the context of what people love. God says, **"Beautiful for people is the love of that which they desire - of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land."** (Aal

`Imran 3:14) In the second time, horses were mentioned in the context of Jihad and terrifying the enemies of God, as Allah, the Almighty, says, **“And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy.”** (Al-Anfal 8:60)